

# MASTERLY STORIES OF AMERICAN RANCH LIFE :-:

By HENRY WALLACE PHILLIPS  
Author of the Famous RED SAUNDERS Tales

ONE spring night in Dakota, when a little red moon hung between us and the horizon line, and the air was filled with hushed small sounds of burblings and bubblings, as the tiny dressmakers of the field began their business of fitting Miss Earth for her debut, Red Saunders and myself sat on the one dry spot we could find, and smoked a mixture of red-willow bark and dry chewing tobacco. "Cha-chashah" the Indians call it, and it is one delicious, aromatic smoke.

We had had winter and winter and then cold weather and frost till we were plumb sick of it. Nature herself revolted, and turned on the spring overnight. It was like walking out into a bath of balmy air. It made you light-headed to breathe.

The mingled smells of moist earth and first plant life were borne along with the tang of smoke, where we had burned the prairie. We felt convalescent, lazy and happy. We pulled on our Injun pipes and said nothing for a long time, until the giant beside me rolled on his back and looked up at the sky.

"Do you believe in lies, kid?" said he.

"Huh?" said I, not knowing whether a moral discourse or a josh was coming.

"What I mean," said Mr. Saunders, "is, when you know a thing must be a damned lie, could you believe it's true?"

"Sure I could," I answered, "I can give you an example of the reverse of it. I know the earth is round, but I don't believe it, at all—not this earth, this nice flat one here! The one in the geography is."

"There you are!" exclaimed the big man in satisfaction. "That's what I'm driving at." He continued to stare at the sky. "Every spring I'm a kid again, and all the wild yarns I've heard come sprouting in my nut till I'm fit to bust, if I don't do something. Usually I just escape jail, as a wind-up, but that's because folks don't understand. I can't find anybody big enough to play with, and so they come around and shake their heads and look mournful and say 'Red, I didn't think you'd do that' or hit him as the case may be, and I don't get over repenting till the Fourth of July. Do you remember the night you and me and Billy the cook took the old pump and made a cannon out of it and held up the paymaster and all his nice soldiers?"

"Yep," said I. "And I can still remember what the colonel said to us. He didn't care whether he hurt our feelings or not."

"It was his brand-new paymaster, just from the East," said Red. "You can't blame the old man much. The story that paymaster told was enough to start something at Washington. Well, that was a kid's trick, wasn't it?"

"Yep."

"But just as real to the paymaster as though we were the bad men he thought us," continued Red. "Now, if anybody had told you a paymaster was held up by a cannon on Renn's flat, you'd have laughed at it."

"I sure would."

"But how about the old Injun that cursed Halpin out, and told him he'd be dead in three days? When we found Halpin stiff, without mark nor wound on him, was there a joke in that?"

"Nary," said I. "I give that up."

Red raised his elbow. "Listen," said he: "I don't have to say so, for you're one still-mouthed boy, but on your life, don't let what I'm telling you go any further. Everybody'd say I was drunk, lying or crazy. I've got a history beats anything you ever heard. I believe the man who told me, and he wasn't drunk, though he might be lying, or crazy."

"First place, let me go back to ancient history, about the Masons. I ain't any kind of a Mason nor any secret society man myself, being a lone wolf by nature, and wishful for other people to let me alone, come good luck or bad. But my grandfather on my mother's side, old Judge Delatour, he was a fierce Mason. You may remember it, being so young at the time, but they had an Anti-Masonic Convention in Baltimore in '31. The old man was still raving about it when I was a kid, so I got the idea that Mason and Anti-Mason was some kin to the civil war, and it's never left me. Always I've taken an interest in anything concerning 'em, for Grandpa Delatour was an old, old man when I was young, and he used to take me out for walks and discourse to me as he couldn't to a grown man.

"Well, when I was in Wyoming, here come a scientific scout, digging up the wishbones of them little insects—they had before the big freshet. Nice little pets, about three box-cars-and-a-half long, with seven double sets of teeth running from their gizzards clean around outside to the tips of their tails. He was a good old boy, the professor, and nights around the fire he used to tell us stories. He told us about the Aztecs in Peru, and the way they and the Spaniards mixed it up. You could almost say they had hard feelings toward one another, and then about the temples in Uxmal, Yucatan. The old man said that the Aztecs and the Mayas were the first Masons—years and years before they converted Old King Solomon, and that Masonry was sun-worship really. He said all the Masonic trucks was to be found on those old temples. I don't know anything about it, that's what he said. But you don't expect a nice thin little old gent with specs a quarter of an inch thick, and whiskers like an Angora cat to string you for the fun of the thing. Then he told about some Asia folks—now, what's their darn names? Sounds like grammar when I used to study it. What was it we done now?"

"Parsees?" I suggested.

"There you are now! Right for a dollar! Them's they—Parsees. Well, they are out and out sun-worshippers, and they have Mason didoes they cut. He also told us that the Hopis and some other southern tribes had their picture writing ceremonies, which was Masonry, pure and simple.

"Well, next comes Mr. Johnson. He was one of these nice upstanding men with a hot temper and a high, proud chest: a good lad, Johnson, with a wife and two kids to support. He had a little wheat ranch of his own, but you got to have rain now and again for wheat. When Johnson started to raise wheat it quit raining, so he went to work on the ranches. He kept about two jumps ahead of the mortgage, and that wore on his temper. Next thing the Mason bug hit us. I don't know how it started, but here and there the boys talked in groups about brotherhood and hanging-together and all that. Seemed to me the punchers held together about as well as any body of men. I must have seen lots and lots of Masons, in my time, without knowing it, but what I never did see was lots and lots of men spraining their backs to help each other out.

"Masons, Socialists, Christians, call 'em what you please, number one, me, I, myself is the first party to get consideration. And that's as it should be, too. Lots of times you monkey with another man's business and he's fit to kill you for meddling. But calling a man names, good or bad, don't make any permanent alteration in his disposition, and I'll bet money on that.

"Johnson got the Mason notion hard. Finally, somebody from Minneapolis come up to form a lodge. I don't know as there was the proper secrecy about the proceedings. Everybody knew, anyhow, and some of the lads in the camp where Johnson worked looked on it all as a merry thing and roasted the would-be brothers, advising 'em to stick to the trade they'd learned or get to be carpenters, or something useful; and they'd 'm-a-a-ah' when the brothers

## Chung-Koo-Kah and Johnson

come around to signify riding a goat. After Johnson got his second degree, the fellers got up a new brotherhood—The Drunk, Dressed-up and Disorderly Fraternity of White Injuns, and when Johnson came home, they went and initiated him. Sam, the blacksmith, had seen one of these Blazing Suns

endants of a Welshman, who hit this country long, long before I knew anything about it. Said the bull-boats the Mandans made and the Welshman's coracle were the same thing. He'd ought to know, as he was a Welshman himself. He said that words in the Mandan language were so like Welsh that he

"I sure do," says Johnson. "Then the Injun poured out a lot of talk in Sioux, so fast Johnson couldn't make out all of it, but it was something about that 'the time had come, for the God was at his height,' and told Johnson to dress at once.

"Johnson was a careful geezer, rocks. First Johnson thought it was some wonderful, natural thing, but soon they were too regular for that, and then it was plain they were made by the hand of man. Figures come to view—more'n a hundred foot high. And all of 'em were Mason stuff. There was work for a hundred thousand men for twenty year, in that canyon. But they had no time to look. Always, hurry, hurry, hurry!



"There they stood, two big, strong cats, ready to leap."

could almost make himself understood. That's kind of wonderful. Then he told us how the Welsh always had been a sort of magicians and wonder workers, and the Mandans sure take after them there. It ain't alone that they were such a peaceable and kindly people that the other tribes looked up to them, it was also because the Mandans' medicine had the others buffaloed. Then the Mandans often have hazel eyes, and their skins ain't red—few Injuns are for that matter, but I've seen a Mandan with a hide like a powdered brunette—you know that lilac color, with a sort of bloom to it, a dark woman gets, when she piles the power on? Well, that's it. Mr. William Apjones convinced me, anyhow. The Mandans were Cousin Jacks from that on.

"Now this Strong Horse proposition had gone the country over, as I told you. He'd scuttled around with the 'Paches, shacked with Navajos, holed up with Hopis. He'd been admitted to every tribe from Manitoba to Yucatan.

"Johnson and Chung-koo-kah took to each other at once. The white man let out to the Injun, as he wouldn't to us other whites, through pride. And the Injun understood and was sympathetic. They hunted and fished and knocked around together for some time, till one hot day, they come to a pool, and stripped for a swim. When the Injun saw that Blazing Sun on Johnson's breast he stepped back and threw up his hands. It was the Maya's sign of the chief of chiefs! Doubting yet, for an Injun is an unbelieving son-of-a-gun, he went through the Masonic jigamares, and of course Johnson stood the gaff.

"The Injun was full of excitement. 'You need money?—gold?' he said.

and kept a note book, in which he wrote the things that interested him from day to day, and also kept track of the calendar. Most coup-punchers wouldn't have known much about the date, except that it was past Christmas, and not yet Fourth of July. He saw by his book it was the 20th of June.

"Led by the Injun, they hustled back to camp, loaded up with grub, took two of the best ponies and beat it fast and furious, toward the Black Hills. Many a mile they rode that night, and after two hours rest in the morning, up and away again. At daylight they saw the dark loom of the Pahah-Sarpedon, and at 8 o'clock they were fair within the Hills—pretty blame good climbing—but an Injun never gives a damn for horseflesh, and Johnson, he was so worked up over the mystery of the thing, he wasn't exactly considerate, neither.

"At a certain spot, the Injun and Johnson got off their horses, and still pressing on in frantic haste, they pushed deeper into the hills. By and by it got wilder and wilder, till at last they struck a limestone country, that looked as if it had been split up with an ax. In the turnings and twistings, and holding on by an eyewinker and one spare toe, and going on all fours, and praying quiet but strong in the worst places, Johnson lost track of his bearings. There is no doubt the Indian twisted him on purpose, yet he was in such a hurry, he couldn't go far with it. They just naturally rode things, that trip, Johnson told me as a solemn fact, they slipped down twenty foot at a time.

"Finally they came to a true canyon, the walls as straight as straight; with pillars like a church, and so narrow and deep it was a sort of twilight at the bottom. A solemn place—great, and quiet, and scary. Then there was carvings on the

the hole—passed it, and shone on the metal. The Injun squeezed Johnson's wrist till the bones squeaked.

"And then, right before their eyes, the whole darn end of the cave—that big square of rock that Johnson had took for a frame—tons and tons of rock began to turn on a pivot in the middle. Slow, slow it turned with never a sound, and as steady as time.

"Lord A'mighty!" says Johnson. "What's next?" He felt ice at the back of his head and a melting of his stummick.

"S-sh!" says the Injun, so savage, it jerked him back to attention. "Ready—Ready! NOW!"

"The opening was wide enough to pass a man.

"Through it the Injun jumps, dragging Johnson after him.

"Johnson fell end over appetite into some kind of gravel.

"Quick!" says the Indian. "Pick 'em up!" He grabbed the gravel by the handful and jammed it in his pockets. In the dim light he could see the Indian working away throwing the stuff into a fold of his blanket, but constant snapping his head around, to watch the door, with the fear of death on him.

"The slit again began to narrow. 'Come!' yells the Injun. They both broke for the door, bumped into each other. Johnson went off his pins. The Injun reached and grabbed him. The door was closing. The Injun tugged and Johnson scrambled. He tumbled into the clear—all but one foot. The door shut down on that—so quiet, so easy, and so sure! But the touch made a lunatic of Johnson. He pulled with the strength of one. The boot came off, along with most of the skin on his ankle, and Johnson was free. Then that door just spread the boot out like butter. So it would have done if the foot had been in it.

"Johnson cursed a short prayer of thanksgiving, the dancing light held for a moment, then vanished, and the two had to fumble their way out, through the dark.

"Later they stood under the waterfall, breathing nice large chunks of free air. There, Johnson looked at the stuff in his pockets. It was gold—nuggets of gold, from pennyweight chunks, to hunks that would go to two ounces. He drew in some more breaths of air.

"I don't like caves," says Johnson. "But this stuff is all right."

"He took a last look at the waterfall, and saw what a clever stunt the whole thing was. Only with the sun at its height could it hit the waterfall at all, and only for three days, the Injun told him, could it go through the fall, and hit on the copper bar.

"The canyon was so narrow and the rocks arranged so that the least change and the sun was shut off. Had it clouded for those few minutes, there'd been nothing to it, until next year.

"And then, the way the waterfall was shaped! Just so tilted, and just so curved, that it acted like a big burning glass, heating the rock and when that expanded under the heat, opening the door, with a force nothing could offset.

"I take off my hat to the man that got that up," says Johnson.

"He tried to pump the Injun as to where, when and how the racket had been worked, but Chung-koo-kah answered him short and stern: 'Because you have that mark,' says the Injun, pointing to the brand. 'I have gone into the sacred house of the Sun. You know you have the gold—more you need not know,' and that's all there was to that. Besides, it wouldn't scarcely have been polite to urge for any more, when a man's staked you to a couple of thousand dollars.

"The Injun wouldn't keep even one chunk of gold, but Johnson bought him ponies, blankets and a good gun.

"On the way out, Johnson was blindfolded. 'Coming in, you not look,' says the Injun. 'Now, yes—you look plenty.'

"So they stumbled their way to the horses. Johnson owns a little ranch in Montana. If we go up there sometime, he can show you the brand on his chest, and a boot leg, sheared off half way. He showed 'em to me, as he kept that boot leg for a souvenir. That ain't exactly proof, but you'd believe it. You'd believed it sure if you'd been with me as he told me, just before he pulled out, him and me having a last drink in the back room of Tobe's together. Listen! Yes, that's the old man hollerin' for me to come and play a game of crib with him. Come on, kid, or he'll throw a fit."

"And thus yanked back to cold reality, I tagged behind to the bull-pen.

"The light reached the edge of